

# Guest Editorial

Peter Beresford

These are complex and difficult days for disabled people. On the one hand the rhetoric has been to get them out of institutions and into the mainstream. Yet under the neo-liberal ideology that has been increasingly influential globally, disabled people have particularly suffered from reductions in public spending and public services. This has perhaps been brought into sharpest relief in the UK, where disabled people have been one of the groups most badly affected by the drastic 'austerity' policies of the Coalition government between 2010 and 2015 (Portes and Reed, 2014). This has recast them as damagingly and often deliberately dependent, turning away from the liberatory progress made by the international disabled people's movement over the last generation

All this makes this Special Issue of the *Review on Disability and Enabling Approaches* particularly timely. The aim has been to explore knowledge, values, skills and standards, including philosophies of independence and independent living and policies available to support this, such as personalisation and direct payments. The Editorial Board has particularly sought to highlight different kinds of professional support found most helpful, for example, interdisciplinary approaches and multi-disciplinary working, alongside disabled people as partners, as well as methods to improve accessibility and to overcome physical, structural, informational and organisational barriers that create disability.

\*

The ten articles included here address a surprising range of issues and academic enquiry. A broad and inclusive definition of disability has been adopted. The articles have been included in three sections, first professional perspectives, second, research-based articles and finally critiquing models of disability. There are contributions concerned with disabled children and young people, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), people with learning difficulties/intellectual disabilities, homeless people with dyslexia and people receiving personal budgets. International contributions explore different models of social work and of disability. There are contributions from researchers, practitioners, disabled people and service users. Research reported is based on qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods, participatory and narrative approaches. Contributors offer proposals for improving professional practice, as well as insights into extending analytical methods and methodology.

In their report of a 'university-community project' on parenting adopted

disabled children, Alice Home and others focus particularly on sharing knowledge and building connections 'between diverse communities impacted by child disability'. Dorothy Badry and Peter Choate question conventional critiques and highlight the need to recognize FASD as a disabling condition and identify why training and knowledge is essential in order to work effectively with children and families. Julie Lawrence and Linzi Brook discuss the successful relocation of people with intellectual disabilities/learning difficulties through a human rights/citizenship approach which pays proper attention to their vulnerability to abuse. Jill MacSporran's article focuses on the evaluation of a pilot project involving service users' involvement as mentors for social work students on observational practice placements

Jane Hernon and her colleagues explore the particular maltreatment of disabled children and young people, reviewing what is known about child protection practice with disabled children, mainly in the UK and offering suggestions for how practice with disabled children could be improved. Stephen MacDonald and Lesley Deacon's article evidences missed opportunities in health and social services for homeless people with dyslexia and makes the case that health and social services need to consider conditions like dyslexia in order to develop support for this particular group of people who have experienced homelessness. Gloria Kirwan's focus is on young disabled people who need daily assistance with 'personal and intimate' tasks. She looks to the idea of empowerment to consider how social workers can work with them in a supportive way, paying particular 'attention to the importance of understanding empowerment at a micro-level as well as the more often discussed macro-level action in social work'.

In his paper, Colin Cameron develops his discussion of the 'affirmation' model of disability, relating it to Freire's idea of critical praxis. He proposes the affirmation model as a practical tool for use by social workers to identify the ways in which disabling social relations are reproduced in everyday encounters. Deborah Espiner and Frances Harnett offer an account in his own words by Kevin, a man identified as having learning difficulties/disabilities. This includes his experience in a psychiatric institution and we hear how he has used his 'experiential knowledge' to 'transform his life' and become 'an advocate for people with learning disabilities'. The final article in this special issue critiques the English 'personalisation' agenda. Written by Dave Sims and Joanna Whisker from professional and service user perspectives it highlights the importance of seeing personalisation as meaning much more than receiving individualised funding.

This last article emphasises the importance of challenging barriers, building on the social model of disability and valuing the experience of disabled people. This could be the watchword for all disability studies and action.

Some readers may just want to dip into this Special Issue and check out issues in which they already have an interest. But the variety of contributions, their different standpoints, knowledge-base and theoretical positions, means that it will also be

helpful for readers to consider them all together. They may discover inconsistencies and contradictions, but ultimately this will offer them a ringside seat to take forward their own personal commentaries on the collection. This will help us all join up the dots in the still often contradictory and heterogeneous discussions taking place around disability issues. This is likely to spark off new thinking and new focuses for further exploration. Given that these are difficult days for disabled people and that there is increasing concern in countries like the UK about the future of social work with adults, this can only be helpful.

Peter Beresford OBE

Professor of Social Policy, Brunel University London

Co-Chair of Shaping Our Lives, the independent national disabled people's and service users' organisation and network.

Peter.Beresford@brunel.ac.uk

## Reference

Portes, J. and Reed, H. (2014), Austerity has hit women, ethnic minorities and the disabled most. *The Guardian*, 31 July. <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/jul/31/austerity-women-ethnic-minorities-disabled-tax-welfare> accessed 13 April 2015.